Resolution on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, notably the case of Odhikar

2023/2833(RSP) - 14/09/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, notably the case of Odhikar.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR, The Left groups and Members.

As a reminder, the human rights situation in Bangladesh has severely deteriorated, including with regard to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, freedom of expression and workers' rights. UN bodies and the High Commissioner for Human Rights have condemned the Government of Bangladesh and Bangladeshi judiciary for persistently intimidating and harassing human rights defenders and civil society activists.

Odhikar, a leading human rights organisation, has faced over a decade of harassment and criminalisation, including being deregistered as an NGO. Two Odhikar leaders, Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan, face trumped-up criminal charges, with a ruling delivered on 14 September 2023.

Expressing deep concern at the deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh, Parliament insisted that the Bangladeshi government restore a safe and enabling environment for NGOs, human rights defenders, activists and religious minorities and uphold the country's international commitments, particularly under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Moreover, Parliament deplored the prison sentence handed down on 14 September 2023 by the Cyber tribunal of Dhaka against Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan. In this regard, the government is urged to immediately and unconditionally quash this sentence and reinstate the registration of Odhikar, and to ensure that civil society organisations can access approved foreign grants.

The resolution called on the Bangladeshi government to guarantee the conditions for free, fair and participatory elections in 2024 and stressed that unhindered domestic and international observation is a key international standard.

Lastly, the resolution recalled that an Everything but Arms (EBA) enhanced engagement process remains ongoing with Bangladesh owing to its serious violations of international conventions. Parliament is concerned that the Odhikar case is a regrettable step back, bearing consequences as to whether EBA preferences continue to apply to Bangladesh.